

VICSES

Writing Style Guide

July 2018



Safer Communities - Together

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1. Introduction

The Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) Writing Style Guide defines our organisation's approach to written communications, to ensure a consistent style.

It specifically covers the following:

- Tone of voice
- Naming conventions (for our units, regions and offices)
- Spelling and usage (relating to common VICSES terms)
- Capitalisation (titles, headings and subheadings)
- Formatting and layout (lists and bullet points)
- Links and web addresses
- Writing for the Hub

For additional guidance, please refer to the latest edition of the Macquarie Dictionary or contact the VICSES Media and Communications team.

2. Tone of voice

VICSES' corporate tone should be an extension of our Values, which are:

- We pride ourselves on our credibility
- We are part of our community
- Safety drives our decisions
- Focused and adaptable
- Together we are VICSES

As such the tone of our communications should:

- Elicit trust, by being:
 - Professional and informative
 - Correct and reliable
- Be accessible and inclusive, by:
 - Using simple language
 - Avoiding jargon, technical language and colloquialisms
 - Using gender-neutral pronouns

3. VICSES naming conventions

3.1. VICSES

Full name	Abbreviation
Victoria State Emergency Services	VICSES

'VICSES' is pronounced 'VIC-S-E-S'.

We no longer use 'SES', however the logo with 'SES' in it will remain unchanged as this is established via legislation.

External communications and publications

The first time you introduce our organisation, you should do so by stating our name in full followed by the abbreviation in brackets. For example:

- The Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) is the lead agency for flood, storm, tsunami and earthquake.
- FloodSafe Week is a major awareness campaign run by the Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES).

After that, you can simply use 'VICSES'.

Internal communications and publications

For internal-only publications, you can refer to our organisation as 'VICSES' from the beginning.

Using 'the' before our name

As a general rule, always use 'the' before our full name.

Don't use 'the' before the abbreviation. For example:

- The Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) is a volunteer organisation.
- I volunteer for the Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES).
- VICSES is the control agency for flood, storm, earthquake, tsunami and landslide.

Exceptions to the rule

When using our full name, you should not use 'the' when what you're describing is plural. For example:

- Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) volunteers must wear appropriate PPC&E.

When using the abbreviations, you should use 'the' when you're referencing something belonging to or associated with our organisation. For example:

- The VICSES Head Office is located in Sturt Street, Southbank.

3.2. Unit names

Units should refer to themselves as '[Unitname] Unit'. For example:

Correct:

- Ararat Unit
- VICSES Ararat Unit
- Victoria State Emergency Service Ararat Unit

Incorrect:

- Ararat SES

For external publications, remember to always introduce the full name and abbreviation of VICSES before you introduce your unit name. For example:

- The Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) will be holding a range of information sessions throughout the state this month on flood safety. The Ararat Unit will be having an information booth...
- Volunteers from the Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) Ararat Unit will be holding an open day on Sunday. Unit Controller John Smith says the Ararat Unit is looking to recruit new members.

For internal-only publications, it is ok to state simply your unit name (for example, Ararat Unit) without introducing VICSES first.

3.3. Region names

VICSES has six designated regions, named in the following format.

When writing for external audiences, the Greater Victorian Boundary format could also be included for clarity.

VICSES format	Greater Victorian Boundary format
Central Region	Melbourne Metropolitan
East Region	Gippsland
Mid West Region	Grampians
North East Region	Hume
North West Region	Loddon Mallee
South West Region	Barwon South West

3.4. Office names

VICSES offices are named in the following format:

VICSES format
Victorian Head Office (VHO)
State Logistics Centre*
Central Office – Mulgrave
Central Office – Sunshine West
East Office – Moe
East Office – Bairnsdale
Mid West Office – Wendouree
Mid West Office – Horsham
North East Office – Benalla
North West Office – Bendigo
North West Office – Swan Hill
South West Office – Hamilton
South West Office – Geelong
South West Office – Warrnambool

*The State Logistics Centre houses Central Office - Sunshine West, State Operations Communications Unit and Procurement and Fleet.

3.5. Support unit names

VICSES support offices are named in the following format:

VICSES format
State Support Unit
Central Regional Support Unit Mulgrave
Central Regional Support Unit Sunshine West
East Regional Support Unit Bairnsdale
East Regional Support Unit Moe
Mid West Regional Support Unit Horsham*
Mid West Regional Support Unit Wendouree

North East Regional Support Unit Benalla
North West Regional Support Unit Bendigo
North West Regional Support Unit Swan Hill
South West Regional Support Unit Geelong

3.6. Social media page names

Facebook

Unfortunately, Facebook no longer allows the use of the word 'VICSES' in all capitals in Facebook page names.

Therefore, all unit and region pages are asked to follow the following format: 'SES [Unitname] Unit/Region'. For example:

- SES Ararat Unit
- SES Central Region

Other (Twitter, Instagram, etc.)

The all other social media pages, including Twitter, the naming conventions noted in this Style Guide apply. For example, the correct page name format for Ararat Unit should be:

- Facebook: VICSES Ararat Unit
- Twitter: @VICSESAraratUnit

4. Spelling and usage

Unless otherwise specified in this section, refer to the latest edition of the Macquarie Dictionary for VICSES approved spelling.

4.1. Volunteers, staff and members

VICSES is made up of volunteers and staff.

You can use 'members' or you can use "volunteers and staff".

Always mention volunteers *before* staff in headings or sentences.

4.2. Spelling

VICSES communications and publications must follow Australian-English spelling.

Words ending in "-ise" must not be spelled "-ize". For example:

- Specialised not specialized
- Organise not organize

4.3. Standardised spelling of common VICSES terms

- Coordinator not co-ordinator
- Floodwater not flood water, floodwaters or flood waters
- Low-lying not low lying
- Powerlines not power lines
- Program not programme
- Road rescue not road crash rescue
- Statewide not state-wide
- Taskforce not task force

4.4. Singular and plural

Proper nouns

An organisation is a singular noun, and should be used with a singular verb. For example:

Correct:

- The Victoria State Emergency Service *is* the control agency for flood.
- The Victoria State Emergency Service *has* more than 5,000 volunteers.
- VICSES launched *its* new training program.

Incorrect:

- The Victoria State Emergency Service *are* the control agency for flood.
- The Victoria State Emergency Service *have* more than 5,000 volunteers.
- VICSES launched *their* new training program.

Acronyms and dates

Add 's' or 'es' (as relevant) to form the plurals of acronyms or dates made up of numbers – do not use an apostrophe. For example:

- Please read the FAQs before submitting your enquiry.
- The situation was different in the 1990s.

5. Active voice

Active voice helps to communicate a message in the most effective way, by clearly identifying the action and who is performing that action.

Active voice can also help to ensure brevity by eliminating unnecessary words.

It also more closely resembles spoken language.

Follow this method to ensure you are writing in active, rather than passive, voice:

- Subject-Action-Object

Or, in other words:

- Who-Does-What

Examples:

Active voice - Preferred	Passive voice
VICSES launched its new Strategic Plan on 1 March 2018.	The new Strategic Plan was launched on 1 March 2018 by VICSES.
VICSES volunteers celebrate diversity by marching in the Midsumma Pride March.	Volunteers from VICSES march in the Midsumma Pride March to celebrate diversity.
Our volunteers contributed approximately 302,000 operational hours to the community in 2016.	Approximately 302,000 operational hours were contributed to the community by our volunteers in 2016.

6. Capitalisation

6.1. Titles

Use Title Case for all titles. This means only the first and last words, proper nouns and any important words are capitalised. For example:

- The VICSES Guide to Emergency Preparedness

Never end a title with a full stop.

6.2. Headings and subheadings

Use sentence capitalisation for all headings (excluding document titles). That is, only the first letter of the heading is capitalised, not the first letter of every word. For example:

- Documents heading example: *Five year financial summary*
- News article heading example: *Orbost Unit spreads flood safe message*

Never end a heading with a full stop.

6.3. Standardised capitalisation

Standard rules of grammar apply to capitalisation, with the exception of the following commonly used words or terms which should always be capitalised, as follows:

- Roles and titles, eg. *Senior Advisor, Readiness & Intelligence*
- Business units, eg. *Media and Communications*
- Teams or committees, eg. *Executive Team*
- Projects and taskforces, eg. *Operational Communications Enhancement Project (OCEP)*

- Legislation, e.g. *Victoria State Emergency Service Act*
- VICSES policies, e.g. *1.01 Membership Policy*
- Conferences and events, e.g. *State Road Rescue Challenge 2018*
- Region names:
 - DO capitalise the word 'region' when referring specifically to one or more of the VICSES regions, e.g. *the North East Region*.
 - DON'T capitalise the word 'region' when referring to a region or regions generally, e.g. *A number of regions across Victoria were affected by strong winds*.
- Unit names:
 - DO capitalise the word 'unit' when using a specific unit title, e.g. *the Malvern Unit*.
 - DON'T capitalise the word 'unit' when referring to a unit or units generally, e.g. *My unit is like a second family*.

Note: 'volunteer' should not be capitalised.

6.4. Acronyms

Always state terms in full followed by the acronym in brackets, before use of acronyms. For example:

- The Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS) is being rolled out across Victoria. AIIMS will improve our organisation's coordination with other emergency services.

Avoid using acronyms if only using a limited number of times.

See Punctuation section for further guidance on plurals of acronyms.

7. Punctuation

7.1. Full stops

Use full stops only at the end of complete sentences. Full stops are not to be used in the following situations:

- After headings and subheadings
- After captions for images when the caption is not a complete sentence
- After dates or signatures
- After page headers and footers
- After items in a bulleted list where all items are not sentences

7.2. Commas

Where individual list items contain “and”, use a comma after the second last item in the list. For example:

- The curtains in my house are black, red and pink, green and brown, and orange.

7.3. Quotation marks

Use double quotation marks to begin a direct quotation. For example:

- “It’s going to rain tonight,” said John.

Use single quotation marks for quotes within quotes. For example:

- “John said, ‘It’s going to rain tonight,’” Jane explained.

Punctuation that is part of the quote should be inserted inside the quotation marks, as per the examples above.

7.4. Apostrophes for possession

Use apostrophes to indicate possession. The apostrophe immediately follows the possessor. For example:

- The unit’s equipment (equipment belonging to one unit)
- The units’ equipment (equipment belonging to more than one unit)

If the possessor is an acronym ending in ‘s’ (such as VICSES), use an apostrophe without an ‘s’. For example:

- VICSES’ not VICSES’s

8. Formatting, lists and layout

8.1. Spacing after a full stop

Always use one, not two, spaces after a full stop or any other sentence-closing punctuation mark, such as a colon, or a semicolon.

8.2. Dot points

Use dot points where appropriate to break up text and make information easier to read.

Introduce bulleted lists with a sentence or sentence fragment followed by a colon. Always capitalise the initial letter of each point. For example:

- The unit equipment included:
 - Electronic navigation devices
 - Mobile phones
 - Pagers
 - Radios

Only include a full stop at the end of a dot point if it is a complete sentence or short paragraph. For example:

- This year has seen a number of achievements in the Assets and Infrastructure area:
 - The State Logistics Centre was officially launched in April.
 - An Asset Audit was completed.
 - A coordinated assets replacement program was developed.

In general, use dot points rather than numbers for lists. However, use numbers if you need to show priority or chronology within the list, or if you need to easily refer back to specific numbered points later.

Restrict indenting to two levels of indentation.

8.3. **Italics**

Use italics only for the full titles of:

- Books
- Magazines and other periodicals
- Plays, films and videos
- Television and radio stations
- Musical compositions and albums
- Works of art
- Legislation and legal cases (e.g. acts and regulations)
- The names of specific ships, aircraft and other vehicles
- Scientific names of plants and animals
- Excerpted text, which should be formatted as a paragraph

8.4. **Bold and emphasis**

Avoid using bold except for emphasis or in headings.

Do not use bold in conjunction with full caps for emphasis. Do not use different coloured text from the surrounding text in a section for emphasis.

8.5. **Citation**

Where citation is necessary, use the documentary-note system, placing referenced materials in footnotes.

Footnotes can easily be added to documents in Microsoft Word.

8.6. **Graphs, diagrams and tables**

Graphs, tables, graphics, diagrams and other images should be labelled as 'figures' if they will be referred to in the text of your publication. For example:

- Figure 4: Results of the Volunteer Engagement Survey

They should be referred to in the text as follows:

- The results of the Volunteer Engagement Survey (Figure 4) indicate impressive volunteer performance in 2010.” Each figure should be labelled with the next consecutive whole number.

8.7. Text alignment

For most publications, text should be left-aligned, with a ragged right edge and in one column only.

Break up large sections of text with subheadings.

8.8. Captions

Include captions with images in publications wherever possible. Information on the caption is discretionary, according to the image and the publication, and may include names of people in the photo, place, date and photographer.

9. Numbers and measurement

9.1. Numbers

Write numbers ten and under out in words.

Avoid beginning sentences with figures by rearranging or writing numbers out in words.

Use a combination of figures and words for whole numbers in the millions and larger. Use a space between the figure and the word in these instances. For example:

- 5 million
- 85 billion
- 1 trillion

Use figures for all other numbers.

Insert a comma after every three digits in order for the numbers to be read clearly. For example:

- 6,829
- 54,768
- 827,983
- 1,927,362

9.2. Phone numbers

Include the area code in brackets for phone numbers and apply bold formatting to the text. For example:

- Phone (03) 9256 9000 to contact the Victoria State Emergency Service.

9.3. Dates

Write dates in the following format:

- Monday 15 September 2018

Include the day of the week in dates where possible.

Do not use ordinal numbers (e.g. 2nd, 17th, 25th) in dates.

For date ranges such as those used for financial years, use the following format:

- 2018-19

9.4. Time

Write time in the following format:

- 6am
- 10.30pm

Write “am” or “pm” in lowercase, with no space before it. Do not use punctuation.

Use a full stop to separate hours from minutes.

Use 24 hour time for operational materials, such as situation reports. For example:

- 0600 hours
- 2230 hours

9.5. Measurement

If numbers are accompanied by a symbol or other unit of measurement, use figures. For example:

- The fire was 10km from the town.
- The truck must not exceed a speed of 100km/h.

There is no space between the figure and the measurement symbol.

9.6. Percentages

Use the symbol “%” in all text, tables and scientific documents.

9.7. Decimal points

When decimal numbers are less than zero, use a zero before the decimal place. For example:

- 0.483, not .483

10. Contractions and abbreviations

10.1. Contractions

Use contractions to improve speed, accuracy and readability. For example:

- Don't instead of do not

10.2. Abbreviations

For Latin abbreviations, state the term in full unless it appears in a dot point list. For example:

- Write for example, but use e.g. in a dot point list
- Write that is, but use i.e. in a dot point list
- Write versus, but use vs. in a dot point list

The exception to this rule is “etc.” which can be abbreviated at all times, followed by a full stop.

Do not capitalise Latin abbreviations even if they begin a sentence.

11. Links and web addresses

11.1. Hyperlinks

When linking to a Hub page or an external website, make sure the linked text describes the link. For example:

- Visit the [Volunteers page](#) for more information.
- For the latest updates and information visit the [Vic Emergency website](#).

Avoid sentences like, “For more information on volunteering, click here.”

11.2. Web addresses

If referencing a complete web address, don't include http:// or www. at the beginning. For example:

- [ses.vic.gov.au](#) not [www.ses.vic.gov.au](#) or [https://www.ses.vic.gov.au](#)

Include a full stop at the end of every sentence, even if it ends with a web address. For example:

- For more information, visit [ses.vic.gov.au](#).

11.3. Links to file downloads

Links that will initiate a file download (such as a PDF) should clearly be marked as such, using a standard format that includes the filename extension followed by the file size in brackets. For example:

- [VICSES Annual Report](#) (PDF, 2.4 MB)
- [3.12 Expenditure Policy](#) (PDF, 60 KB)

The link text should reflect the title of the file. The file type and size should be in brackets, and should not be linked.

As opposed to internal and external website links (which should generally be incorporated into the text), file download links should appear on a new line, introduced by text if necessary.

Set file downloads to open in a new window.

11.4. File size formats

Write file sizes as KB, MB and GB, with a space between the number and measurement. For example:

- [Equipment Catalogue](#) (PDF, 9.6 MB)

MB sizes can be stated as whole numbers or up to one decimal place. For example:

- [VICSES Annual Report](#) (PDF, 4 MB)
- [Community Matters, Winter edition](#) (PDF, 5 MB)

Files less than 100 KB can be written as full numbers. For example:

- [Personal Protective Clothing and Equipment General Order Form](#) (PDF, 264 KB)

Note, PDFs and Word document downloads should be kept as small as possible to allow easy download.

11.5. Hub pages

Direct users to specific Hub using the following format while adding a hyperlink to the relevant page:

- [The Hub > My State > Communications Pathways](#)
- [The Hub > My State Health and Wellbeing > Healthwatch](#)

12. Writing for the Hub

12.1. Creating relevant, readable and engaging content

Ensure your page content is easy to navigate and understand:

- Give your page or article a short and meaningful title.
- Include the most important information in the first sentence; then order subsequent paragraphs by importance.
- Group content into short topical paragraphs of two-three sentences.
- Omit information that is not relevant to your audience.
- Write in an approachable style – avoid technical or overly formal language.
- Avoid jargon and colloquialisms.
- Avoid acronyms where possible (never assume your audience understands what an acronym stands for), and always state name in full before use.

- Use active voice – ie. the subject before the verb. See section 5 for more information.
- Always end the page or article with a call to action, for example:
 - Where to go or who to contact for more information, eg. *Contact the Media and Communications team for more information.*
 - Relevant dates and deadlines, eg. *Feedback is due 29 September.*
 - Next steps, eg. *More information will be provided in the September edition of the Bulletin.*
- Use images, graphics or video to make content more interesting and give clarity to text.
- Review before publishing.

12.2. Ongoing review and governance

Review your Hub pages monthly and delete or update information that is:

- No longer relevant
- No longer correct
- Outdated
- Long and can be condensed
- Old content that could be refreshed or delivered in a more engaging or efficient way.

13. Supporting information

Follow these links for further information and supporting documents:

- [The Hub > My State > Media and Communications > V ICSES Style Guide](#)
 - VICSES Design Style Guide
 - Word templates
 - Powerpoint templates
 - Corporate stationery
- [The Hub > My State > Communications Pathways](#)
 - **Resources:** Seasonal Schedule, Paddy Platypus, etc.
 - **Social Media:** Setting up a new page, general tips and trends, etc.
 - **TV, Radio and Print:** Media Training and Awareness, manuals and templates, etc.
 - **Engagement:** VHO Business Unit contact list, etc.
 - **Publications:** Contribution deadlines and distribution dates for Community Matters and The Bulletin.

14. Further guidance

For further information, guidance or advice, please contact the VICSES Media and Communications team at publications@ses.vic.gov.au.

This guide is updated periodically. The last update occurred on 3 July 2018.